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SUBJECT: LESOTHO: EDUCATIONAL ADVISING TAKES OFF

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¶1. SUMMARY: Embassy Maseru's student advising program has now grown into a lively and formal weekly program which has begun its third year. The program is building on the successes of the past year to continue its expansion. After a tour of local radio stations by our dedicated academic advisor, Public Diplomacy Assistant Ms. Mamosa Mapeshoane, academic advising participants have doubled. As we now seek to expand this engagement through offering regular standardized test practice sessions, Embassy Maseru's academic advising program has finally come into its own. END SUMMARY.

Small Program, Big Dreams

¶2. Three years ago, sensing promise among many of the bright young students of Lesotho, Embassy Maseru held several ad hoc educational advising sessions to build awareness among Basotho youth of educational opportunities in the United States. Ms. Mamosa Mapeshoane, Embassy Maseru's sole Public Diplomacy FSN at the time, took the reins of the program shortly after its inception. Interest in these ad hoc sessions led to regularly scheduled two-hour educational advising sessions currently held on a weekly basis at Embassy Maseru's Public Diplomacy facilities.

¶3. The educational advising program immediately faced two major challenges: 1) the severe financial need of many Basotho students coupled with Embassy Maseru's status as a "PD-Lite" post without access to scholarship programs such as United States Student Achievers Program (USAP) and the Fulbright program; and 2) the need to bridge the divide between the substantively different education systems of the United States and Lesotho in a way that makes sense on U.S. college applications.

Finding Funding: Building from Year to Year

¶4. Despite these challenges, the program has soldiered on, helping students find funding sources and their future alma maters in the United States. Adversity bred creativity, and Embassy Maseru has been increasingly successful at helping students find support. In the last year, the program helped four students access scholarships from universities and independent foundations in the United States, compared with no such scholarships in the previous year.

¶5. Former Basotho academic advising participants enrolled as undergraduates at Plymouth State University, Campbell University, and Pennsylvania State University this past fall. Two Basotho graduate students - one receiving the Carl Malmberg

Fellowship Program at University of Pittsburg - are now studying in the United States. A Basotho student receiving a full scholarship (under a U.S.-sponsored regional competition) is now studying at Brandeis University. While these numbers remain small, they are tangible results of the student advising program.

Outreach Matters

¶6. In recent months, the PD section has conducted a number of interviews on national and community youth radio stations, speaking to students and parents about study in America. Since this outreach initiative, the number of students attending advising sessions has roughly doubled.

¶7. PD staff members have also conducted personal outreach to several local high schools, including Machabeng College -- an international high school with a highly regarded International Baccalareate (IB) program. Early outreach targeted local educational institutions which draw talented students, and presentations focused on the U.S. education system, completing U.S. college applications, and the types of experiences students in American universities can expect.

Future Program Expansion

¶8. In response to student requests and Embassy Maseru's observations regarding the weakest points of Basotho applications to U.S. colleges and universities, we plan to expand our program to include one session each week at which students can take practice SAT and TOEFL tests. As the Embassy does not serve as a test center and students often must travel to neighboring countries to take standardized tests, we believe that this additional service will be a notable contribution to program participants' success. In the immediate future, our

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educational advising outreach efforts will expand into rural areas, and we are presenting a proposal to the National University of Lesotho (NUL) to create an ongoing dialogue encouraging more NUL graduate students to take part in educational advising.

Academic Awards, PD Rewards

¶9. COMMENT: As sending increased numbers of Basotho students to the U.S. is a specific goal of Embassy Maseru under the most current Mission Performance Plan, the blossoming educational advising program is bringing real rewards to our mission. With the expansion of educational advising outreach and additional program components designed to address Basotho students' tradition weaknesses such as standardized testing, we hope that this program will deliver even more results in coming years.

END COMMENT.

PERRY